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# The Two-Year-Old: Changes in Thinking

Two-year-olds are wonderful, exciting, busy and very demanding. They've come a long way in two years and there's much more growing ahead! This fact sheet is designed to provide information that might be helpful as you play with and care for the two-year-old in your life.

## Mental pictures

Your child's developing physical skills are easy to see. A parent never forgets when his or her toddler stands and takes those first wobbly steps. While not as easy to see as new physical skills, many changes in thinking are also taking place.

Next time you're playing with your toddler, try this: Hide a toy under a pillow or blanket. Does she search for it? Or does she seem to forget about it. If she's less than 18 months old, she may not seem to care. Her toy is truly "out of sight, out of mind." She doesn't keep a picture of her toy in her mind, so when it's out of sight it no longer exists for her. If your child is over 18 months, she may pull on the blanket to look for her toy. She's learning that people, places and objects exist even if she can't see them.



A toddler can think about playing with his favorite toy without having it in sight. He doesn't have to see his mother "in person" to recognize her voice on the phone. He's gleefully happy when riding in the car on the way to his grandmother's house. He can imagine being there because he has a mental picture or image of his grandmother and her house.

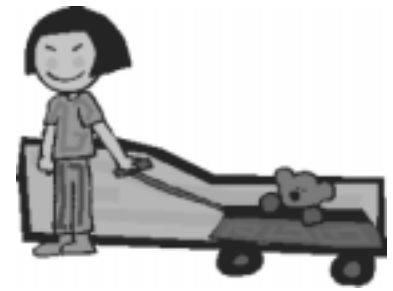
The toddler can use her new thinking abilities to solve problems more easily. She doesn't always need to depend on trial and error. When given a tennis ball and two cans of different sizes, she can tell which can the ball will fit into. Rather than trying to put the ball into each can, she can picture the size of the ball in relation to the size of the can.

By the age of two years, your child may begin to use symbols to stand for objects, people and events. In his two-year-old mind, a doll may represent a real baby. He can put the doll in a stroller and take his "baby" for a walk.

## Learning

The toddler-aged child learns by experimenting. She looks at, tastes, smells and feels everything she can. Sometimes she can transfer information she's learned in one situation to another. For example, your child may remember that her boat floats in the bathtub, so it may float in a mud puddle too!

The toddler also learns by imitating people around him. He may enjoy sweeping with a broom, putting paper in the trash or folding clothes. He's pretending that he's Mom, Dad or another adult.



You can help toddlers develop thinking abilities by giving them new objects to play with. A toddler will enjoy playing with many household items, anything from dress-up clothes to pie dough. Dough has a wonderful taste, smell and feel. Also, it can be pushed and pulled and pounded! In addition to sparking a toddler's imagination, dress up clothes have special smells and can be fascinating to touch!

### **Words, words, words!**

Your toddler has probably begun to realize that words are useful and fun. Also, they stand for objects, people and places. She may now use language to get information, think aloud, tell a story and get what she wants.

The toddler's receptive speech, or the words she understands, is much greater than her productive speech, or the words she uses when speaking. Toddlers may understand and use between 200 and 800 words. Most of these words are names or people, places and objects. She also uses "action" words such as "go bye-bye." She's able to put together complex sentences by connecting simple ones –*All gone. Me bye-bye.*– with *and*, *or* and *but*.

To increase their language abilities, toddlers need to hear adults speak to them in many different ways. For example, you can:

- Give information. Explain what is going on or what you are doing. "See the puppy; she's chasing her ball." or "I'm going to squeeze some detergent into the sink, add water and wash the dishes."
- Give reasons. Connect what you do with why you are doing it. "I'm going to lock the car door so no one will fall out."
- Give descriptions. Explain relationships and events. "See the baby? You were that little once, but now you're bigger." "See how much smaller your toy mouse is than your teddy bear!"
- Praise your child. Praise helps your child to feel valued and helps language development. "You picked up your shoes. Good job!"
- Ask questions. Help your toddler join in conversation. Ask him questions such as, "Are you feeling sad?" "Do you want to find something to do together?" "Can you tell me what color my shoes are?"

Language development is a continuous process. Taking time to read short, simple stories and to talk and listen to your child will enhance development.

#### **Sources:**

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